United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/817
30 January 1991

# WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General rejects Iraqi Foreign Minister's charges that he and States behind Security Council resolutions are responsible for "crimes against Iraq"; says Saddam Hussein must respond positively to appeal for withdrawal from Kuwait if solution to "grave and tragic conflict" in Persian Gulf is to be found.

- Secretary-General recommends to Security Council extension of mandate of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon for another six months, until 31 July, and of the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group for one more month, until 28 February.

- United Nations Environment Programme to send three experts to assess environmental damage in Persian Gulf caused by oil spill; calls for inter-agency/industry meeting.

- Hocine Djoudi of Algeria elected President of Economic and Social Council.

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Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, in response to the letter of 28 January from Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz of Iraq, today rejected his accusations that States behind the Security Council resolutions on the Gulf conflict and the Secretary-General himself bore personal responsibility for "the heinous crimes" committed against Iraq. In his letter, Foreign Minister Aziz had stated that Iraq was the victim of "United States, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Zionist aggression". The Governments involved, he said, had the sole objective of "vengeance" against the Iraqi people and its leadership because they had opposed the "imperialist goals of those Governments".

In his reply today, the Secretary-General told the Iraqi Foreign Minister that he had read his letter "with regret" and could not "but reject its connotations".

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Mr. Perez de Cuellar reiterated his 15 January appeal, which he had made again on 22 January, when he expressed his "profound grief and anxiety at the increasing severity of the war, the widening of the area of hostilities" and his fear that the toll in death and destruction would escalate unless his appeal received a positive response. He said he continued to believe that such a response was needed in order to find a peaceful solution to the "grave and tragic conflict" and to save human lives.

The Secretary-General recalled meetings he had had with Foreign Minister Aziz in Amman on 31 August, and with President Saddam Hussein in Baghdad on 13 January; and his appeal of 15 January to Saddam Hussein to show readiness to comply with Security Council resolutions, "so that the course of events could be turned away from catastrophe and towards a new era of justice and harmony, based on the principles of the United Nations Charter".

Mr. Perez de Cuellar also reminded the Iraqi Foreign Minister that he had stressed, at the Council meeting on 29 November 1990 when the 15 January deadline resolution for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait was adopted, that in requiring compliance with the Council resolutions, "the United Nations sought not surrender but the most honourable way of resolving a crisis in a manner that respected all legitimate interests and was conducive to the wider peace and the rule of law".

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The Security Council held consultations this afternoon to discuss the Secretary-General's reports on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG).

The Council is scheduled to hold a formal meeting tomorrow morning to extend, on the Secretary-General's recommendations, the mandate of UNIFIL for another six months, until 31 July, and that of UNIIMOG for another month, until 28 February.

In his report to the Council on UNIFIL, the Secretary-General said that although the Force had still not been able to carry out the tasks entrusted to it, he believed it continued to make an important contribution to maintaining international peace and security in a volatile area.

He said the Government of Lebanon had asked in a letter that the mandate be extended for a further period, giving as a reason that important developments had taken place since UNIFIL's mandate was last renewed. The Lebanese Government had said it had gained control of the greater Beirut area and had deployed the army in certain regions in the southern part of the country.

In his report, the Secretary-General again referred to the serious financial situation of the peace-keeping Force in Lebanon, because Member countries had not paid nearly $300 million in assessed dues. The Secretary-General said he was especially concerned, since the Force needed to replace equipment that had become obsolete or unserviceable.

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The Secretary-General also submitted a 17-page report from a United Nations survey team on the scale and deployment of UNIFIL, in which measures for the streamlining of the Force were recommended, including proposals to save some 10 per cent in the Force's military strength.

The UNIFIL was established in 1978 after the invasion of Israeli forces into southern Lebanon following a Palestinian commando raid into Israel. The Security Council called on Israel to immediately cease its military action against Lebanon's territorial integrity, and established the Force to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restore international peace and security and help the Lebanese Government re-establish its effective authority in the area.

The Council also discussed this afternoon the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend the mandate of UNIIMOG, which is stationed on the border between Iran and Iraq.

The Council is also expected to hold consultations on the Persian Gulf crisis at 4 p.m. tomorrow.

In a separate development, the Secretary-General today applauded the joint statement by the United States Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union that current military action by the allies in the Gulf region could be halted if President Saddam Hussein showed evidence of his intention to withdraw from Kuwait. The Secretary-General told correspondents that any move to end the hostilities and the death and destruction was to be welcomed.

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The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is sending three scientific experts to the Persian Gulf region this week to assess the environmental damage after the oil spill over the weekend. The agency is also taking steps to convene an inter-agency meeting in Geneva on 5 and 6 February to define the environment-related problems.

The task of the team will be to obtain independent and objective scientific and technical information on the physical and environmental damage, as well as on the socio-economic aspects of the war on the region. Another objective of the mission will be to ensure a continuous flow of information to those who may be in a position to act upon that information.

The mission, to be led by Michael Gwynne, Director of UNEP's Global Environment Monitoring System and Co-ordinator of UNEP's Earthwatch Programme, is expected to arrive in Saudi Arabia on Saturday, 2 February.

The UNEP Executive Director, Mostafa K. Tolba, has also called a two-day meeting of various United Nations agencies and representatives of major oil industries with interests in the region to define the numerous environment-related problems of the Gulf region, to address the gaps in the information flow and to develop a process to bridge those gaps.

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The agencies being invited to the meeting include the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission.

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Hocine Djoudi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, was this afternoon elected President of the Economic and Social Council for 1991.

Mr. Djoudi, who was the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations from September 1984 to December 1990, has served as a Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council and Chairman of its First (Economic) Committee. He represented his country on the Security Council in 1988 and 1989, and was Council President in May 1988 and August 1989.

Mr. Djoudi has held a number of posts in the Algerian Foreign Ministry and has been Algeria's Ambassador to Spain, Portugal, Mozambique and Lesotho.

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